

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video by Jane E. Goodman

Review by: Tony Langlois

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Jane E. Goodman, *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. 239 pp., b&w photos, song lyrics with English translation, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0253346290 (cloth), \$65.00; ISBN 0253217849 (paper), \$23.95.

Based upon field research amongst the Kabyle “Berber” communities of Algeria and Paris, Goodman’s book succeeds elegantly in the daunting task of drawing together a very wide range of materials and experiences in a unified, compelling argument. *Berber Culture on the World Stage* is centrally concerned with the negotiation of identity through music, dance, language and other social institutions. This process is shown to operate in various cultural spaces and in several geographical locations simultaneously. For example, whilst ‘Amazigh’ language activists in Tizi Ouzou demand recognition of linguistic rights within an officially “arabist” Algerian state, and others use theatre to challenge the established oligarchy of village councils, so their counterparts (and close relatives) in Paris strive for “progressive” social organizations which are more inclusive of women than traditional structures allow.

Employing the common discursive oppositions of ‘tradition’ and ‘progress,’ politically conscious artists and musicians lubricate the processes of change through their songs and public performances. To exemplify this process in detail, Goodman shows how renowned musician Idir and poet Ben Mohamed manipulated resources derived from local oral tradition to reformulate a Kabyle identity which was capable of functioning at both sub-national and international purposes. This new musical representation of *Berberitude* has an authentic ‘sound’ and borrows key linguistic motifs from recordings of women’s songs, it nevertheless sheds all original references to popular Islam and bawdiness. Instead, Idir and Mohamed re-configure “mythological” material in order to address their contemporary context as an internal ethnic minority within Algeria. Most interestingly, the author shows how these songs remain open to interpretation in various ways by different members of the wider (widest) Kabyle community depending upon the “subject position” of the listener. She also manages to convey a powerful sense of the complex bonds and tensions that exist between the émigré communities in France and their families in the Kabyle Mountains. Access to many and diverse sources

of cultural capital are available to this pan-national community, according to such factors as their age; the village they are associated with (or the quarter within one); their residence in Algeria or Paris; and membership of patrilineal institutions, cultural associations, political parties or maraboutic lineages. Goodman presents individuals, whether musicians, cultural activists or simply family members, as conscious negotiators of these different kinds of capital, and draws particular attention to gender issues as a source of stress between liberal and conservative factions in the community.

Goodman's thoroughly-illustrated argument is made in three sections. The first introduces readers to the "histories" and other discourses which inform the concept of Kabyle village life. As the region has been almost permanently under the control of more powerful political forces, most *written* historical material comes from colonial collections and reports. These versions, in which Kabyles are subjects, are, perhaps unsurprisingly, contradicted by versions of history which persist in *oral* tradition. The construction of a contemporary self-consciousness Kabyle ethnicity is best understood in the context of the similarly hegemonic attitudes of post-colonial Algerian regimes. The new state's attempts to define a coherent sense of national identity stubbornly denied and suppressed meaningful recognition of ethnic diversity until the last few years, opting instead for centralist (and internationalist) discourses of socialism and Arabism. During the late 1980s and 1990s these core planks of state legitimacy were challenged, almost to destruction, by politicised Islamic organizations, and under heavy fire very little leeway was offered by the government for potentially divisive constructions of ethnicity, whether these emerged from the Kabyle, M'zab, Aures, Bedouin or Tuareg.

The second section of the book considers textual evidence for the distinctiveness of Kabyle culture and how these have been employed by Kabyle activists to best suit contemporary circumstances. Goodman deals convincingly with this topic, making some acute observations regarding the relationship between oral texts and gender. In the Kabyle, for example, older village women have traditionally been the archivists of the oral heritage, whereas it is now men who mostly manipulate these sources for more public consumption. Thus in the production of popular song texts, (feminine) oral sources are mined by male composers and poets for motifs which, though evocative of the village context, are actually entirely dislocated from it.

In the third section of Goodman's argument, the notion of performance, whether in music, dance or participation in other realms of communal activity is investigated. A case study of *Amazigh* 'protest singer' Ait Menguellet's approach to Berber culture is described here, one which contrasts interestingly with that of his contemporary, Idir. (Further reading on this important singer's work can be found in Cherbi, M. and K. Arezki (1999).) In this section we are also shown how music videos serve the purpose of representing, to both internal and external audiences, a mythologised Kabyle culture; rural, independent and free from Arabization. Goodman's central concerns of text and discourse are here manifested in social action and musical performance. The book is well illustrated throughout with ethnographic details, interviews with key musicians of the period and a painstaking but readable analysis.

This is a welcome book in very many ways, not least because this region is sorely neglected in anglophone ethnography. In any language this exhibits a trans-Mediterranean approach which is itself quite novel with regard to the Kabyle. Given its focus upon the negotiation of discursive phenomena through social action, however, its core argument is germane to many contexts quite unrelated to North Africa, and so should be of interest to scholars in other fields. It is also a remarkably accessible account, given the subtlety and complexity of the fields of cultural activity described here. From the perspective of someone working in another part of Algeria at much the same time as the author, my only criticism might be that much of what is

discussed here in terms of *Berberitude* is actually equally applicable to the country as a whole—and in some respects to the Maghreb in general. However distinct and isolated Kabyles may feel they are in their mountain villages (or Paris apartments for that matter), their relationships with diasporic communities, the challenges they face in terms of language, religion, modernity, tradition and so on, are very common to many Algerians who would never consider themselves Berbers. For example, the common language of most Algerians is a rarely written patois called *derija*, which includes very many words of Berber origin alongside borrowings from Spanish, French and even English. In principle, *Derija* is at least as problematic to the national Arabist project (from either the educationalist or doctrinal perspective) as the Kabyle's *tamazigh* may be, although it is without a cultural movement to promote it. (See Viorolle (1995) for an analysis of linguistic issues in Raï songs.) Again, the gender relations described in the Kabyle, and the somewhat unorthodox popular forms of Islam, are not particular to this region and can be found throughout North Africa. To be fair, Goodman does touch on this issue, and her approach is justified by the simple fact that she has studied a relatively discrete proportion of the Algerian population and reflected their experience accurately. That this experience is nevertheless not unique to Kabyles is perhaps irrelevant to the book *per se*, but readers may still be better able to contextualize it if they knew this.

What is certainly more unique to the Kabyle, and this is an aspect to which the author does not extend her usual eye for detail, are the characteristics of the music itself. Music from the region is easily distinguished from most other Berber styles and certainly from Arabic traditions by its sonority and instrumentation as well as its language, and it would have been useful to have included some illustrative transcriptions, or even a CD of examples, to fill in gaps that readers unfamiliar with the music may experience. A book with this wealth of insightful observation should be of interest to a very wide academic readership and one would have thought that the inclusion of accompanying musical examples would help the publishers achieve the broader market the book deserves. Even as it stands, however, the book is certainly a landmark in its field and an exemplar of excellent ethnographic writing and research.

Tony Langlois

Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender*. London: Routledge, 2005. 243 pp., musical examples, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, discography, index. ISBN 0415310296 (cloth), £55.00; ISBN 0415310288 (paper), £16.99.

One of the first things we learn in Sheila Whiteley's *Too Much Too Young* is the age of its author. For a book that explores how youth and constructions of youthfulness intersect with gender and genre in the realm of Anglo-American popular music, this disclosure makes for an enticing opening. On the first page we also learn that Whiteley is openly cynical about the popular music industry. Her concern with the "sexploitation" of young artists was, in fact, the impetus for this book. But while her professional advocacy for women artists, contempt for "overly-exploitative record companies" (p. 8), and resigned acknowledgment that "the music business was, and largely remains, a man's world" (p. 10) may shape the political soul of this project, the heart of Whiteley's book investigates the concepts of the "child," "little girls," and "little boys" while engaging in dialogic exchange (see further, Middleton 2000) to interpret the songs and biographies of such artists as Brenda Lee, Michael Jackson, Kate Bush, Tori Amos, Björk, Jim Morrison, and Cliff Richard.